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AN OBJECT OF ART

SASCIA SMIRNOF, only son, entered Doctor Koscelkow's office with a serious face, carrying a package under his arm.

"Ah, dear boy!" exclaimed the doctor. "How are you? What lucky wind brings you here?"

Sascia lowered his eyelids, put his hand on his heart, and said with trembling voice:

"My mother, Ivan Nikolaevic, sends me here to bring you her greetings and her thanks. I am her only son, and you saved my life; you cured me of a dangerous malady, and . . . we really don't know how to thank you. . . ."

"Enough, enough, my boy," interrupted the physician, not without a certain complacency. "I did what any other physician would have done in my place. . . ."

"I am her only son," insisted Sascia, "and we poor people are not able to repay you for your kindness. We are sorry, doctor! Therefore, my mother and I beg you to accept this as a token of our gratitude. . . . It is a beautiful thing . . . of antique bronze . . . a rare object of art. . . ."

"But why, why do you trouble yourself?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, don't refuse it," interrupted Sascia, unwrapping the package. "You would offend us. The object is very beautiful, of antique bronze. . . . It belonged to my poor father, and we have kept it as a remembrance. . . . My father used to buy old bronzes and sell them again to amateurs. Now my mother and I are in the same busi-

ness. . . ." While he was speaking, he had unwrapped the package and had put the bronze on the table.

It was a small candlestick of antique manufacture, and really valuable. The stem was composed of two nude female figures in poses that, to tell the truth, we do not care to describe. The two little women were smiling coquettishly, and seemed to say that if they did not have to hold up the candle-socket they would bound into the room and commit heaven knows what pranks and follies!

The doctor was admiring the present and at the same time scratching his ear and blowing his nose.

"Beautiful! Yes, it is very beautiful," he said at length; "but—what shall I say? It is a little too risqué—a little too bold. Do you understand me?"

"But why . . . ?"

"Why? . . . Because no one but the devil could have invented such a thing. . . . To keep it in my office would be really dangerous. . . ."

"How you do judge art, doctor!" grumbled Sascia, offended. "It is an artistic bronze. . . . See what beauty! How fine! One's soul is filled with admiration in looking at it. Before such masterly skill everything else is forgotten! What expression! What action! What spirit!"

"I see, I see very well," interrupted the doctor; "but I am married; I have children; I receive ladies. . . ."

"Oh, well! If you will judge art from such a conventional standpoint! But this object has a higher value. You must look at things in a nobler way. You

must be superior to the opinion of ordinary people—especially in this case, as by your refusal to accept our gift you would offend me and my mother. I am her only son, and you saved my life. . . . We offer you the most cherished of our possessions. . . . We are only sorry that the other candlestick, the twin to this one, is missing; but it cannot be found!”

“Thank you, thank you, dear boy! I am very much obliged to you. Present my compliments to your mother. . . . But judge for yourself what I am to do with it—I have children in the house, and ladies. . . . However, leave it here, since you cannot understand. . . .”

“There is nothing to understand,” said Sascia, delighted. “Put it up here near this vase. . . . What a pity that the other one is missing! . . . but it can’t be found. . . . Good-by, doctor!”

After he had gone, the physician contemplated the candlestick for a long time.

“It is a wonderful thing,” he said, speaking to himself. “It would be a crime to throw it away. But it is simply impossible to let it stay here. To whom could I give it?”

After much thinking, it occurred to him that he had not yet given anything to his lawyer, who had recently won a cause for him.

“That’s it! Good!” he exclaimed joyfully. “As a friend of mine he will not accept any pay, and I will give him this bronze. He is unmarried and he won’t have any scruples.”

The physician changed his coat in a hurry, seized the candlestick, and went quickly to the lawyer.

“Good day, my friend,” he said as he entered. “I have come to thank you for your trouble in assisting me. Since you will not accept any money, you will at least accept this little present. It is

an object that seems very beautiful to me. . . .”

At the sight of the bronze the lawyer could not repress his admiration.

“What a wonderful thing!” he exclaimed. “How can they invent so many new things all the time! . . . Wonderful! Marvellous! Where on earth did you find such a rarity?”

Still, after the first enthusiasm had passed, the lawyer glanced apprehensively at the door.

“You know,” he said at last, “I cannot accept such a present.”

“Why not?” asked the physician uneasily.

“Why? Because there is my mother; . . . and then ladies come here, . . . and; besides, there are the maids. . . .”

“Ah, no, now,” cried the doctor. “You are not going to refuse it! It would not be kind of you. . . . See how artistic it is! . . . What expression! What action! What spirit! Don’t refuse it; I should feel hurt.”

And hastily the physician took his leave, thankful to have rid himself of his embarrassing present.

The lawyer, left alone, considered the bronze with great attention. He took it up, turned it this way and that, and admired it—but came at last to the same point as had the physician, namely, an endeavor to decide to whom he could give it.

“It is a splendid object,” he said to himself, “and it would be folly to demolish it, but it is also improper to have it about. The best thing to do is to make a present of it. . . . Aha! An idea! . . . To-night is my friend Sciaskin’s benefit night. He likes such things. . . . I shall give it to him.”

And that night the actor Sciaskin received from the lawyer the artistic candlestick. During the whole evening

the actor's dressing-room was crowded with men who came to see the wonderful bronze. . . . There was a general exclamation of admiration at such a fine and valuable object. However, if one of the actresses wanted to enter, Sciaskin had to call through the door:

"You cannot come in just now, madame. I am not yet dressed!"

After the performance the embarrassed actor said to his companions:

"Where on earth can I put the thing! I live in furnished rooms. . . . Ladies often come to see me. . . . What shall I do with it?"

"I'll tell you what, sir," said the barber, who was present at the scene, "sell it. I know a woman who buys antique bronzes. I will give you her address."

The actor followed the barber's advice.

Two days afterward, Doctor Koscelkow was sitting in his office, meditating upon diseases of the spleen, when he heard somebody opening the door and saw Sascia Smirnof rush into the room. The boy held a package in his hands. He was radiant.

"Doctor!" he exclaimed, his voice tremulous with joy. "Imagine my happiness! By a lucky chance we were able to find the second candlestick, the twin to yours. . . . My mother is so glad. I am her only son; you saved my life, and . . ."

And Sascia, his hands shaking with emotion, placed the candlestick once more before Doctor Koscelkow. . . .

The physician opened his mouth, tried to speak, but was unable to utter a word. . . . Fright and astonishment seemed to have deprived him of the power. . . .

By ANTON TCHEKOF.

From Flegrea, Naples.

(Translation, Lotus Magazine.)

THE SUBSCRIBING OF LETTERS

RESPECT, courtesy, tenderness are all shown in a collection of subscriptions to letters of from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries which I have before me.

All those who love the past and delight in its savor will enjoy a glance at these varied forms which an autograph-hunter has had the notion to collect. In reading them one has an idea of the personality of those who wrote them; a little of themselves remains; a little of their time may be divined.

The very old forms always contain an invocation for heavenly protection. Then people believed, people prayed, and did not conceal the fact as if it were a weakness.

Hear our Kings:

"Praying God Monsieur de Matignon to have you in his holy and sacred keeping,

"Your good friend,
"HENRY."

From Henry IV.

"I beg you to be more than ever careful of your person; for me I remain very well, and I assure you of the continuation of my affection, and I will pray the Good God with all my heart that he will have you in his holy keeping.
"LOUIS."

That one was from Louis XIII. From one generation to another the change makes itself felt. The period has become broader. In conscience could one